

Sound Outlook – Part 8: The Garden City

Resilience is one of the defining traits of Owen Sound and its inhabitants. The ability to read the direction of the wind, trim sails, and adapt to changing times. When the rail lines which served the city were removed, Owen Sound kept right on chugging. Those former rail lines have now been converted to picturesque trails - trails that meander through the city offering citizens and visitors a unique look at our industrial past through the lens of our more green and vibrant present.



This current hurdle of COVID-19, while vastly different in scale and scope, has been treated in a similar manner by Owen Sounders. They've detected the prevailing winds, adjusted course and are carrying on into the future. And much like the conversion of sooty railways to lush tree lined trails, many Owen Sounders have been inspired to beautify their surroundings even if they've been limited to their own backyards.

At first there were just one or two. While scrolling social media in the spring I spotted a couple local friends posting shots of tools, soil and lumber which shortly thereafter became proud pics of newly installed raised beds. Then our next door neighbours installed a beauty raised bed in no time flat. Next, my *other* next door neighbours threw in a gorgeous new row of shrubs. By June my social media was overflowing with pergolas, flowerbeds, veggie patches, and happy Owen Sounders with dirt on their faces.



Local greenhouses and garden centres rode the wave beautifully following their re-opening in early May. We all waited for Vanvugt's, Westside, and Town and Country to explain how and when they'd be opening to indulge our green thumbs. I tried to round out our strawberry patch with another plant - no luck, sold out. Our neighbour sought a specific type of shrub to complete his matched set - no luck, sold out. This was not cause for frustration, but rather an encouraging sign that these local businesses had been supported effectively by their primarily local clientele.

One greenhouse, despite having to delay their opening, sold out of their stock and closed for the year early while thanking their customers for such a great season. Truly inspiring.

Greenhouses are not the only branch of business to contribute to the recent greening of Owen Sound. The Grey Gallery has installed a lovely set of six raised beds in the previously vacant lot beside their 2nd Ave. East location.

These beds have been done up right and are enjoying effective care. They're bursting with leafy



greens, sunflowers and all sorts of other ... pretty ... plants - I'm no horticulturist, but I know a pretty plant when I see one, and I saw lots down there.

There are further plans for this space which include a sculpture garden and a mural. Something to keep an eye on for sure.



Not to be outdone by its citizenry and local businesses, the City of Owen Sound and the O.S. Downtown Improvement Area came out swinging with flower boxes, hanging flowers, and all sorts of potted flowers all along the downtown core. Of course this is nothing new, as these displays are a seasonal highlight in the city, but they are particularly striking this summer and justify a socially distant tour of the downtown all on their own.

Perhaps now you're seeing a bit of the resilience I mentioned. Local businesses had to delay their season? No problem, we'll clean them out in record time once they open. Can't visit parks and open spaces? Ok, we'll grow our own beautiful scenery right in the backyard. Need to cut down visits to the grocery store? Alright, we'll build a garden and harvest our own salads thank you very much. Vacant lot in need of a makeover? Here's oodles of flowers, some sculptures and a mural.



Sometimes it's hard to discern a silver lining in the current situation, but Owen Sound sure has found its green thumb in all of this. The best part? All of this planting, growing and greening doesn't just disappear once COVID goes the way of our old rail lines. What we've started now will continue to bear fruit for years to come - all we have to do is sit back and watch it grow.

Special thanks to my neighbours for letting me brag about their yards, the Grey Gallery for their wonderful work downtown, and Clancy Francoeur and Garrett Alevan for modelling their lovely gardens.

Words and photos by Zak Erb